

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL AND ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I understand that my Republican colleagues and President Trump are busy celebrating the passage of the tax bill that was voted on at 1:30 in the morning. They are very excited, and they are very happy about it. I understand that. I guess, if one is a billionaire like President Trump or is a wealthy campaign contributor, you do have a whole lot to celebrate. Maybe, if you are 1 of the 6,000 lobbyists here in Washington, DC, who helped to write the bill, you are celebrating a lot today. Yet, if you are one of the vast majority of the American people who is in the middle class, you should not be celebrating today. In fact, you should be pretty nervous.

The passage of this legislation marks a great victory for the Koch brothers and other wealthy campaign contributors who will see, at a time of massive income and wealth inequality, huge tax breaks for themselves. In other words, the wealthiest people will become much wealthier. Meanwhile, the deficit—what is owed by our kids and our grandchildren—will increase by \$1.5 trillion as a result of this bill. The largest and most profitable corporations—companies like Apple, Microsoft, Pfizer, and General Electric—despite record breaking profits, are going to see very, very large tax breaks to the tune of many billions of dollars.

Now, at a time when the very wealthy are becoming much richer, tens of millions of American families are struggling to keep their heads above water economically. There are 40 million Americans who are living in poverty. The nonpartisan Tax Policy Center tells us that in terms of this legislation, 83 percent of the tax benefits will go to the top 1 percent by the end of the decade, who are already doing phenomenally well, and that 60 percent of the benefits will go to the top one-tenth of 1 percent. Meanwhile, at the end of 10 years, some 92 million middle-class households will be paying more in taxes.

On top of all of that, as the only Nation—major country—on Earth not to guarantee healthcare to all people, this bill will result in 13 million Americans losing their health insurance. I understand the President was really excited about this. Hey, what a great day. There are 13 million more Americans who are losing their health insurance when we are the only major country on Earth not to guarantee healthcare to all people.

In the ending of the individual mandate, what all of the experts tell us is that our healthcare premiums will go up. If you are an average person out there, your healthcare premiums will very likely go up as a result of this legislation. Meanwhile, starting next year—I am not talking about 10 years from now—some 8 million middle-class families will pay more in taxes.

Doesn't it say a lot about Republican priorities when they make permanent the tax breaks for corporations; yet they make temporary the tax breaks for working families, which will expire in 8 years?

Furthermore, I would hope that every American is listening closely to what Speaker of the House PAUL RYAN is talking about. I have to give RYAN credit for being pretty honest about the intentions of the Republican Party. Just this morning, he was on ABC, saying what he has said for quite a while, and that is that the Republican plan is a two-step approach. Step No. 1 is passing the legislation that passed last night here and today in the House. Step No. 2 is, having run up a deficit of \$1.5 trillion, they are now going to come back and offset that deficit by making massive cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

According to RYAN, they have a two-step program. Step No. 1 is to give massive tax breaks to the rich and large corporations and to run up the deficit by \$1.5 trillion. Step No. 2 is to offset that deficit by cutting Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

How unspeakable and outrageous is this plan? How much does it go against what the American people want? This gives huge tax breaks to billionaires—to the Trump family, to the Koch brothers—and then pays for those tax breaks by cutting Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

There are millions of senior citizens and people with disabilities in Vermont and all across this country who, today, are struggling to buy food, to heat their homes, and to buy the prescription drugs that they need because they are trying to survive on \$12,000, \$13,000, \$14,000 a year in Social Security. There are people who have worked their entire lives and have exhausted themselves as they approach retirement. Do not tell those people who live on \$12,000, \$13,000 a year in Social Security that you are going to cut their benefits through a Chained CPI or by some other mechanism in order to give tax breaks to billionaires. How outrageous that would be.

Don't tell older workers—many of them with health problems after their having worked 20, 30, 40 years—that you are going to give billions of dollars in tax breaks to Microsoft, Pfizer, or General Electric, but then you are going to ask them to work more years in order to be eligible for Medicare.

I understand that every Member of the Congress would like to go home for the holiday season, and so would I. This is the time of year during which Vermont is very, very beautiful. The truth is that it would really be unconscionable for us to leave Washington after giving tax breaks to billionaires and large corporations while we ignore the enormous problems that are facing the middle class and working families of our country.

When Donald Trump ended the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

Program, the DACA Program, nearly 800,000 lives were thrown into chaos and uncertainty. Without the legal protections afforded by the DACA Program, hundreds of thousands of young people today are living in terrible fear and anxiety about losing the legal status they currently have in the only country they have ever known. These are young people who grew up in the United States, went to school in the United States, are working in the United States, and are in our military. This is their home. It would be unspeakable to take away their legal status and subject them to deportation.

Since the President's announcement in September, more than 11,000 people have already lost their protections under DACA, with approximately 22,000 set to lose their legal protections by the March 5, 2018, deadline. These are hundreds of thousands of wonderful young people. We cannot turn our backs on them. We must deal with DACA before we leave for the holiday break. Any end-of-the-year spending agreement must address the fear and uncertainty caused by the administration's reckless actions, and a clean Dream Act must be signed into law.

This is not just what BERNIE SANDERS wants; this is what the American people in overwhelming numbers want. A Quinnipiac poll came out just the other day in which 77 percent of the American people supported maintaining legal status for these young people and allowing them to move forward toward citizenship—77 percent—and that is consistent with other polls that have been taken. A vast majority of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents understand that it would be incredibly cruel and harmful to our country in so many ways to deny legal status to the Dreamers. We cannot turn our backs on the Dreamers. We must address their crisis right now.

It has been almost 3 months since funding for community health centers has lapsed. Our Nation's 1,400 community health centers serve more than 27 million people in roughly 10,000 communities throughout the country. In my home State of Vermont, one out of four Vermonters gets their primary healthcare, dental care, low-cost prescription drugs, and mental health counseling at a community health center.

How does it happen that the Republican leadership can spend months on a bill to give tax breaks to billionaires but not address the lack of funding, the reauthorization of the Community Health Centers Program or the Children's Health Insurance Program, which provides healthcare to 9 million children?

In this country, there are 1.5 million workers and retirees in multi-employer pension plans who could see the pensions that they worked for over their entire lives cut by up to 60 percent. People were promised these pensions a few years ago, and in a disastrous act, Congress took away that promise, and

working people could lose the pensions they were promised by up to 60 percent cuts in those pensions. Congress needs to act before the end of the year to make sure that no one in America in a multi-employer pension plan will see their pension cut.

Those are real issues impacting real people, but there are more. There was an article recently in the *Washington Post*, and it said that because of major cuts to the Social Security Administration, people with disabilities are not getting their claims processed in a timely manner. The result was that in 1 year, if you can believe it, 10,000 people with disabilities died before they got their claims processed.

What the Republicans have been very active on is making sure that the Social Security Administration does not get the funding it needs, which means that it is harder for people who have retired and people who have disabilities to get the information they need or the claims that they have processed in a timely manner. We must make sure that every senior and person with a disability gets treated with dignity. We have to restore adequate funding to the Social Security Administration.

One of the great outrages that currently is taking place in this country and really is quite beyond belief is that at a time when we live in a competitive global economy and when we need the best educated workforce in the world to be able to do the new jobs that are being created, which require more education, we have over 40 million people in our country who have left college or graduate school in debt and sometimes deeply in debt. I am talking about people I have met who have gone to medical school or dental school and are \$300,000 or \$400,000 in debt. People graduate college \$100,000 or \$150,000 in debt. This is a crisis that is impacting millions of people. It is impacting our entire economy. It is an issue that must be addressed. Maybe, just maybe, before we give tax breaks to billionaires, we might want to significantly lower the debt burden so many people in this country have in their student debt.

This is the year 2017, soon to be 2018. This is the wealthiest country in the history of the world. Yet there are communities in Vermont, Utah, and communities all over this country that do not have adequate broadband service. How does a business start up in a community if that community does not have rapid broadband or good cell phone service? The answer is, it doesn't. It can't. That is one of the reasons why rural America is hurting so badly. We must invest in rural infrastructure to make sure every community in this country has quality, affordable broadband.

There is an opioid epidemic sweeping this country, impacting Vermont, my neighboring State of New Hampshire, West Virginia, Kentucky, and all parts of this country are seeing people dying from overdoses from opioids and heroin. This is an epidemic that must be

addressed. We can't simply walk out of here and leave people all across the country without the resources they need to treat people who are addicted and to prevent our young people from becoming addicts. We need to invest in treatment and prevention for the opioid epidemic.

As we speak, there are over 30,000 vacancies in the Veterans' Administration. That means that we have to make sure every veteran in this country who goes to the VA gets the quality and timely healthcare he or she needs. We can't turn our backs on the veterans. We have to invest in the VA.

The bottom line is that, as much as all of us would like to get out of Washington and go home, we simply cannot turn our backs on tens of millions of working people and people in the middle class. It is not good enough to pass tax breaks for billionaires and then leave town. So I hope the Republican leadership will immediately bring to this floor the legislation that we need to address the many crises facing the middle class of this country.

With that Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO MARK E. MILLER

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, today I wish to honor Mark E. Miller, for his distinguished public service and professional assistance to the Senate Finance Committee, as well as to the rest of Congress.

Mr. Miller served as the executive director of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, or MedPAC, for the last 15 years. During that time, he dedicated himself to our country, ensuring Congress received impartial, data-driven, and sound policy advice to transform the Medicare Program while protecting our Nation's seniors and the disabled.

MedPAC was established by Congress in 1997 as part of the Balanced Budget Act. It is a nonpartisan agency that provides analysis and policy recommendations regarding the Medicare Program, including payment, beneficiary access to care, and quality of care for traditional fee-for-service Medicare and Medicare Advantage. As all of us know, the analysis we get from MedPAC is critical in how we, as Members of Congress, debate, address changes, and ultimately make improvements to the Medicare Program.

Throughout his service, Mr. Miller ensured that MedPAC consistently fulfilled its mission of providing objective, empirically driven policy analysis and advice to Congress.

Mr. Miller himself also testified, answered calls, and otherwise provided invaluable advice on complicated Medicare payment issues to both majority and minority leaders, Finance Committee chairmen and ranking members, as well as other committee members, and other Member offices regarding all things healthcare. Throughout his years of service, Mr. Miller has proven himself a trusted source of objective information.

Mr. Miller gave years of his life, including countless long nights, weekends, and early mornings to make sure Congress has the best and most reliable information it can get. In turn, that analysis has guided many ideas and recommendations into legislation that made its way to a President's desk for signature. Mr. Miller's professionalism, expertise, energy, patience, humor, and dedication make him an example to all of us as we work the process of designing and ultimately enacting legislation. Mark has been there from the beginning, watching an idea being born, helping to develop policy to achieve that idea, and providing valuable policy counsel as it works its way through the legislative process to ultimately becoming law.

Thanks to his sense of purpose, dedication, and love for this country, Mr. Miller should be seen as just as much an influence on our current Medicare policy as most Members in this body. Mark is a consummate professional, and he will be missed. I wish him all the very best as he takes the next steps in his successful career.

May we ever remember Mark's service, and may MedPAC ever be guided by the same sense of duty and purpose Mr. Miller instilled in his 15 years leading that organization.

TRIBUTE TO STEVE JOHNSON

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, Cesar Chavez, the great champion of justice and human dignity, once offered this advice about friendship: He said; "If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him. . . . The people who give you their food give you their heart."

The Senate Dining Room isn't Steve Johnson's house, but for the 22 years that he has worked there, Steve has poured his heart into his job, and he has become a friend—or at least a friendly face—to Senators, our families, staff members, and visitors.

As general manager of the Senate Dining Rooms and two other eateries in the Capitol, Steve works hard to create places where people who might not normally talk to each other can sit down at adjoining tables, eat a meal, and maybe swap stories or jokes.

In the Senate Dining Room, with its white linen table cloths and crystal chandeliers, you might see Republican and Democratic Senators and staff members asking after each other's families. In the refectory on the first floor, reporters and visitors to the Capitol stand in line together to grab a